DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 492 CS 014 318

AUTHOR Lynaugh, Susan; Schmitt, Maribeth Cassidy
TITLE Sharing Our Visions along the Way.
INSTITUTION Reading Recovery Council of North America, Columbus, OH.
PUB DATE 1995-00-00
NOTE 5p.
AVAILABLE FROM Reading Recovery Council of North America, Inc., Suite 100, 1929 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1069. Tel: 614-292-7111; Web site: http://www.readingrecovery.org.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Opinion Papers (120)
JOURNAL CIT Network News; p5-7 Spr 1995
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Literacy; Primary Education; *Program Effectiveness; Sharing Behavior; *Success
IDENTIFIERS Indicators; *Reading Recovery Projects

ABSTRACT

The remarkable impact of Reading Recovery (RR) on current literacy programs--not only in Vermont and Indiana but throughout North America, as well as the potential for movement and change for greater numbers of children and teachers--is dramatic and impressive. This article states that responding to questions about RR success, seemingly a simple matter, is actually quite a complex endeavor when the many ways of judging success as well as the authors' roles and responsibilities for sharing it are considered. The article asks: What are the indicators of success and how do others learn of it? It suggests that these indicators range from a global viewpoint, which often emerges from outside the organizations, to a more local perspective: that of an individual RR child's success. The article proposes that, because the global interpretation of efforts is best characterized when it is based on accurate local information, RR educators should assume responsibility for sharing successes at both the global and local level. It discusses in detail sharing and communication; the global perspective; the local perspective; and why success must be shared at both the local and the global level. (Contains 13 references.) (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 452 492

Sharing Our Visions Along the Way.

by Susan Lynaugh and Maribeth Cassidy Schmitt

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

J. F. Bussell

CS 014 318

Success is a journey, not a destination. (Author Unknown)

Sharing Our Visions Along the Way

SUSAN LYNAUGH
TEACHER LEADER
ST. JOHNSBURY, VERMONT
MARIBETH CASSIDY SCHMITT
TRAINER OF TEACHER LEADERS
PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Speaking about success, Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "The great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving." As RR educators, we know we do not stand still; rather, we invariably are moving in new directions, checking out hypotheses, challenging our observations, and questioning our own practices. We are continual learners and developers of change. As a teacher leader in Vermont [Susan] and a trainer of teacher leaders in Indiana [Maribeth], we are asked frequently about the success of RR in our states. The remarkable impact of RR on current literacy programs — not only in Vermont and Indiana but throughout North America, as well as the potential for movement and change for greater numbers of children and teachers — is dramatic and impressive.

Purposes for the questions, as well as expectations about our responses concerning these successes, vary depending on the perspective of the inquirer. We have discovered, for example, that classroom teachers and support staff often have a personally relevant view of the program and are interested in individual progress and school-level success. As they become intrigued by how quickly the lowest-achieving children begin to read and write, they formulate more specific procedural questions about how the children are succeeding at such an accelerated rate. Parents' questions and comments generally relate to observations and the obvious successes of their own children. Administrators and school board members, on the other hand, are generally interested in hard data and graphs, such as those found in annual site reports. And finally, university professors and other educators, with an interest in literacy issues and research, often question the data and procedural methods and techniques that compare and contrast with their own knowledge and beliefs about how children become independent readers and writers (e.g., Hiebert, 1994).

Responding to questions about RR success, seemingly a simple matter, is actually quite a complex endeavor when we consider the many ways of judging success as well as our roles and responsibilities for sharing it. What are the indicators of our success and how do others learn of it? We suggest these indicators range from a global viewpoint, which often emerges from outside the organization, to a more local perspective: that of an individual RR child's success. Because the global interpretation of our efforts is best characterized when it is based on accurate local information, we urge RR educators to assume responsibility for sharing successes at both the global and local levels.

Sharing and Communication

Irving Berlin once stated, "The toughest thing about success is that you have to keep on being a success." *Education Week* journalist Lynn Olson warns that "Some of the best-known school reform networks are the victims of their own success. ...All of these groups are struggling to get their ideas and practices out to wider audiences with integrity" (1994, p.43). In her article, Olson discussed a 1990 report by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation on successful replications that shared some common elements: "...evidence that the initial program is having the desired impact; careful planning; the ability to leverage community support, resources and dollars; committed leadership; effective technical assistance; and sharing and communication" (p. 43).

It is the critical element of *sharing and communication* from the Mott Foundation's description that we wish to deal with in this article, because it is important to both the local and global views of our success. RR has been in the country for over a decade, and districts are in various stages of implementation; however, no matter what the stage, we might too often assume that our efforts and successes will speak for themselves. We should assume nothing. We must make conscious efforts to share our discoveries and engage in dialogue about these successes and the powers of this program with others at all levels of education. French philosopher Marcel Proust said, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." We should not assume that others can see what we are seeing! We suggest this caution is relevant at both ends of the range, from the global perspective to that of the individual child.

First, we must make an intentional effort to communicate the clear goal of RR: "...to alter the trajectory of each child's progress, and bring as many low-achieving children as possible up to the average band of performance in their classes with sufficient independence to continue to work at or beyond this level of achievement in reading and writing." (Clay, 1990, p. 63.) It is not the goal of the program to affect all members of a particular age cohort, but rather to reduce effectively the number of children having difficulty getting under way in reading and writing in a first grade classroom. This goal may be misunderstood (e.g., Hiebert, 1994), and it is our responsibility to communicate it accurately. RR has accelerated the progress of nearly 100,000 children in the last 10 years. They have become independent readers and writers and have caught up to or exceeded average levels in their classrooms. And countless others have made substantial progress, though they have not reached the average band.

Another understanding that often requires clarification relates to the use of RR teaching procedures with whole classrooms or groups of children. Because this is such an effective program, people want to know why we do

continued on next page

Sharing Our Visions (continued)

not incorporate it into all instructional settings. Again we can look to Clay to provide us guidance: "Many critics have not understood that the teaching procedures used in RR are not recommended for the majority of children; they are able to succeed in a variety of classroom programmes." (Clay, 1990, p. 62.) Although the general principles concerning increased reading and writing in the classrooms and fine-tuned observations of readers and writers are beneficial to all children, the specific teaching procedures are individually designed for each child. What works for one child may not be appropriate for another child in the same group. RR works with the strengths and responding repertoire of an individual child. This responsive interaction is at the core of our teaching and demands continual observations and intensive interactions.

The Global Perspective

It is important for us to know how RR is judged at the global level, beyond our own ranks. Many researchers and educational journalists have reviewed and identified RR as one of only a few powerful and effective early intervention programs in the United States, not only for its impact on children's literacy development, but also on the professional development of teachers (e.g., Allington, 1994; Collier, 1994; Hiebert & Taylor, 1994; Pikulski, 1994; Olson, 1994; Savano, 1994; Wasik & Slavin, 1992).

The program's success has often been discussed in relation to the positive impact of early intervention. Robert Slavin, noted researcher at Johns Hopkins University and developer of the "Success for All" program, favorably refers to RR as a successful early literacy intervention in his comparison of programs, noting that, "Success in the early grades does not guarantee success throughout the school years and beyond, but failure in the early grades does virtually guarantee failure in later schooling." (Slavin, Karweit, & Wasik, 1992, p. 179) In a later work, Slavin and his colleague describe RR as having a comprehensive theory of the literacy process upon which to base its instructional intervention, and therefore, as having a larger impact than those that are based on fewer components of the process, such as specific skills (Wasik & Slavin, 1993).

Richard Allington, professor of education at the State University of New York at Albany and research scientist at the National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning, has long been an advocate for early intervention and a supporter of RR. He and his colleague, Sean Walmsley (1994), acknowledge the substantial cost and commitment required to implement the program, while suggesting that the results might be worth it:

The most intensive approach we know about, Reading Recovery, is also one of the very few instructional support programs to have demonstrated long-term effects on children's reading abilities. (p. 253)
In other words, low-cost interventions sometimes work reasonably well... However, the more expensive Reading Recovery provides the best evidence of long-term success for the largest proportion of students served. (p. 262)

Both the instruction for the children and the professional development of teachers were highly regarded in a new book about educational change processes. Ken Wilson, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, and Bennett Daviss in *Redesigning Education* (1994), acknowledge that RR incorporates several key features of a successful redesign process:

It has shaped its methods according to the results of its own and others' research. It has tested and honed its techniques through years of trials and refinements, analogous to industry's processes of product prototyping and test marketing. It equips its specialists with a common body of proven knowledge and skills that allows instructors to tailor each lesson to each child's needs—in marketing terms, to shape the product to the customer—rather than expecting every child to adapt to an identical course of lessons that moves at an inflexible pace. Equally important, the program maintains rigorous systems of self-evaluation or quality control, and offers ongoing training and support to the teachers and schools— "dealers", in effect—that adopt it. (pp.50-51).

Speaking of the expansion of RR in America, they observed it is equaled in pace "only by rare commercial successes such as skateboards in the 1970s or personal computers a decade later. There's a simple explanation for such phenomenal growth: RR has proven to be more effective and efficient at correcting reading problems than its competitors." (Wilson & Daviss, 1994, p. 50).

In their objective report of a fact-finding visit to New Zealand, two senior members of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), Frater and Staniland (1992/1994), provided both quantitative and qualitative evidence of the success of RR in New Zealand. Describing anecdotal evidence of RR's instruction as having a meaning-making emphasis, they noted that the children seemed to be in control of the meaning-making in a way that suggested a high degree of competence:

Particularly striking was the confidence that some pupils felt which permitted them to volunteer an aside about a character, a situation, or a picture during the course of their own reading aloud; it demonstrated that they were not only grasping the patterns, but were engaging reflectively with the meaning of the text. It also showed that they were able to control their reading effectively and confidently enough momentarily to suspend, and then return to, its sequence — no mean feat. (p. 149)

The Local Perspective: This Johnny *Can* Read

At a more local level, as we share and communicate with others in our districts, we need to remember that we have *learned* to see things differently. For example, when my teachers-in-training in Vermont comment on the lack of a classroom teacher's understanding about a certain child's competencies, they will say, "But why can't she see?" I [Susan] have to remind them what they have been through in order to be able "to see with new eyes." We cannot

continued on next page

Sharing Our Visions (continued)

expect others to be able "to see" our successes as we do. We must learn to share and communicate our successes to all levels of a school and community. And it is especially important that we help the RR teachers be ambassadors of the program as well.

This became specifically clear to me during one school visit. Since Vermont is a rural state, I travel to 22 different schools within my consortium. These schools vary in size from a two-room school to a supervisory district school with 1,200 students. On my visit to the two-room school, I assessed a little boy named Johnny. He was originally assessed to be the lowest-achieving child in that school in his multi-age room. Vermont has passed Act 230, which means total inclusion of all students in every classroom. Johnny would most likely have been designated for special education services in many other states. At the end of his program, Johnny did a wonderful job on the *Observation Survey*. When I marveled over his reading and asked him how he became such a good reader, he said, "I read lots of books."

On my way out of the school, everyone else was out on the playfield, but they were lining up to return to the building after recess. As I began to leave the driveway, I noticed that all 50 children, two teachers, and two paraprofessionals were looking at me. Suddenly it occurred to me why they were waiting and watching. I rolled down the window and yelled out, "Johnny made it! He did a super job reading and writing!" All 54 people clapped and cheered and yelled, "Hooray!" It gave me goose bumps. And to think that I almost missed this "window of opportunity."

We cannot just work with these children and expect other people to know what we are observing. We must share each and every success. It reminds me of sitting in a waiting room in the emergency room waiting for medical personnel to come out and tell us what is happening with a loved one. We do not expect them to just walk by and not say anything about what they have observed and can see with their trained eyes. Children's literacy lives hold the same importance. We should share what we can see. Others may be looking at the same landscape but not see what we do.

I now make a point of never leaving a school where I have successfully tested a child out of the program without sharing the vision with everyone possible. I often take the child to read to the principal or superintendent, right at that moment. They both love it. Principals and superintendents enjoy the direct contact with a child and being reminded of the teacher's success. They also need opportunities to see with new eyes. They can share in the success of each child. This way it becomes a school and community success, not just a RR success.

Often, it is the first-grade peers who are the first to notice their RR friends are competent readers and writers. They are very good observers of who can read in the classrooms. We should make an effort to share the children's successes not only with the teachers, but also with the children in the classroom. I teach one of my students before school begins. Our school has an early breakfast program, and I pick him up in the cafeteria. I am often deluged with other children who want to come with me to the RR room. One day a little boy asked if he could please come with me. I said, "Maybe I can take you some day, but you're such a good reader already, aren't you?" He replied, "Yes, but you take the best readers, don't you?" I hesitated and then said, "Yes, we do, Timmy. I think they are the best readers."

Success Must Be Shared

We should share our visions, share our ways of looking with new eyes. We should communicate our purposes and spread the word about our successes. Each individual success on the school level is part of that bigger 100,000 children global success rate. Not everyone can know Johnny personally, but this one individual child is proof of the success of RR in that small school and community in Vermont. He is proof that children, whom we did not previously think could read and write, are now participating fully with their classmates. We could tell the people at this small school in Vermont about the success of the program somewhere else, but their own Johnny is the most poignant, powerful indicator of changing beliefs and seeing with new eyes for that school and community. Each child deserves the same applause and acknowledgment. It is the Johnnies of the world who make a difference and count in our quest for literacy in our classrooms, schools, states, and nation. We should do our part to share the successes at the local level, and ultimately at the global level. Carter (1976) makes this suggestion in *Education of Little Tree:*

Gramma said when you come on something good, first thing you do is share it with whoever you can find; that way, the good spreads out where no telling it will go. Which is right. (Foreword.)

References

Allington, R.L., & Walmsley, S.A. (1994). No quick fix: Where do we go from here? In R.L. Allington and S.A. Walmsley (Eds.), *No quick fix: Rethinking literacy programs in America's elementary schools* (pp. 253-264).

Carter, F. (1976). *The education of Little Tree.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Clay, M.M. (1990). The Reading Recovery programme, 1984-88: Coverage, outcomes, and Education Board district figures. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 25,* 61-70.

Collier, S.N. (1994). *Getting schools ready for children: The other side of the readiness goal.* Atlanta: Southern Regional Educational Board.

Frater, G., & Staniland, B. (1994). Reading Recovery in New Zealand: A report from the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. In *Literacy, Teaching and Learning, 1,* 143-162. (Reprinted from report of the same title, 1992. Norwich: HMSO Publications.)

Hiebert, E. (1994). What difference does it make to an age cohort? *Education Researcher, 23,* 15-25.

Hiebert, E., & Taylor, B. (Eds.). (1994). *Getting reading right from the start: Effective early literacy interventions.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Olson, L. (November, 1994). Learning their lessons. *Education Week.*

Pikulski, J.J. (1994). Preventing reading failure: A review of five effective programs. *The Reading Teacher, 48,* 30-39.

Savano, D. (September, 1994). Reading one on one. *The Executive Educator.*

Slavin, R.E., Karweit, N.L., & Wasik, B.A. (1992/1993). Preventing early school failure: What works? *Educational Leadership, 50,* 10-18.

Wilson, K.G., & Davies, B. (1994). *Redesigning education.* New York: Henri Holt.

Wasik, B.A., & Slavin, R.E. (1993). Preventing early reading failure with one-to-one tutoring: A review of five programs. *Reading Research Quarterly, 28,* 178-200.